Tesca Fitzgerald ’13—Computer Science Alum

TEACHING ROBOTS TO THINK

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**ON THE COVER** A 15th-century Book of Hours is now on display in the PSU Library. Photo by Kelly James. See story on page 10.
PORTLAND STATE plays a unique role in Oregon higher education. We are the state’s urban research university, and we serve an incredibly diverse population of students. We educate and help establish careers for the most low-income, the most minority, the most non-traditional students in the state. This is something in which I take a great deal of pride, and it’s part of what makes PSU a special place.

Our ability to maintain accessibility has been tested in recent years, however, as cuts in state funding required us to raise tuition and cut services. As you know, we are in the middle of a legislative session and have joined the other public universities in asking lawmakers and our new governor, Kate Brown, to put Oregon higher education back on roughly the same financial footing as before the Great Recession. The past several years have been tough on almost everyone, including PSU.

Now, things are getting better. As many other states have come to realize, investing in higher education is key to broadening the prosperity that comes with a growing economy. We hope our state elected officials feel the same and will act accordingly. Additional dollars will help ensure that PSU remains a place where students from across the spectrum enjoy the opportunity to get the education, advice and support they need to graduate.

We are not putting all our eggs in the state-funding basket. With the disbanding of the Oregon University System, PSU has gained greater autonomy. We are now governed by our own Board of Trustees, and although I work closely with the six other public university presidents, I’m also looking at ways that PSU can leverage its strengths to become more financially stable. Among them:

• Equitable funding. Our research shows that PSU receives much less funding per student than our counterparts, even though we serve the most low-income students. Making the state funding formula more equitable and responsive to academic outcomes would help PSU. The Higher Education Coordinating Commission is working on this, and we will continue to push them hard.

• A culture of philanthropy. We have made great strides in recent years to increase the level of donations to PSU, thanks to our generous alumni and community partners. Response to our Creating Futures campaign is allowing us to offer many more scholarships to deserving students. Read about its success on page 20.

• Research. Our efforts to expand our research and our strategic partnerships are paying off. The most recent example is the $24 million grant from National Institutes of Health, our biggest ever.

• Local funding. I am exploring the possibility of reaching out to the region PSU serves to help stabilize our budget. Stay tuned for more information.

These, and other ideas, give me a great sense of optimism that the rise of PSU will continue well into the future. Thank you for being a part of it.

Wim Wiewel
PRESIDENT, PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY
Inspired by RFK

Your last issue with the cover photo of Robert Kennedy at PSU for the article in Portland State Magazine [“The Lost Tapes,” Fall 2014] brought back many happy and sad memories. I attended PSU from 1967 through the school year of 1970, which were probably the most exciting and historical years in the history of the school. The list of speakers in your article is proof of just how incredible the times were back then.

I remember attending those speeches of many of the speakers at PSU, which can now again be heard on tape. I especially recall waiting in line for over an hour to get into the PSU gym to hear Bobby Kennedy speak and becoming so inspired by him that I went downtown to his campaign office for the presidency to volunteer. Only weeks later, however, RFK was tragically shot dead in Los Angeles like his brother, JFK, five years before. America has never recovered from the loss of these great leaders.

Cris Paschild is to be heartily thanked and commended for her sharp and dogged determination to discover exactly what she had found by accident in these invaluable recordings of history.

Richard Blue ‘62

Praise for the archivist

Archivist and head of the PSU Library Special Collections Cris Paschild provided an outstanding service that will bring enduring benefits for generations. She discovered and facilitated the recovery of recorded political speeches from tremulous times in the late ’60s. Now you can hear Bobby Kennedy address thousands in the PSU gym in 1968 just weeks before his assassination. Paschild’s gift of discovery may be listened to at pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/orspeakers.

Ron Campbell ’69, MAT ’70

A football legacy

I thoroughly enjoyed your tribute to former Portland State football coach Pokey Allen in the fall issue of Portland State Magazine [“Looking Back,” Fall 2014]. Having been in the college coaching profession for most of my professional career, I knew Pokey well. A coach is often measured simply by wins and losses. I prefer to measure success by the legacy that is left, as your article so appropriately stated.

As a Portland State alumnus and former Viking football player, I hope that Pokey’s legacy is never forgotten! I agree that Pokey would have led a Pac-12 program to a Rose Bowl victory.

Robin Pflugrad ’81
Former head football coach, University of Montana

Letters
Protected bike lanes

BICYCLING ADVOCATES have long assumed that more people would ride bikes if their routes felt comfortable. Protected bike lanes—like these on Northeast Multnomah Street in Portland—seemed like a promising solution. Few studies had looked at lanes separated from car traffic by curbs, planters, parked cars or posts, until PeopleForBikes turned to Portland State’s Transportation Research and Education Center (TREC). In an effort called the Green Lane Project, TREC researched five cities across the country, collecting definitive evidence that people feel safe and comfortable riding in protected bike lanes. The report gives transportation agencies the science they need to build safer, better bike routes.
Describing core values

DIVERSITY, collaboration and relevance are the words that best represent the core values of PSU, according to alumni who answered a recent survey. Input from alumni and the rest of the University community is needed for a new strategic plan that will guide the University for the next five to 10 years. In response to dramatic changes in higher education, Portland State’s new Board of Trustees asked that a new plan be created. Nearly 700 alumni completed the survey, using individual words to answer questions. Words describing PSU’s greatest strengths: urban, location and community. Its greatest weaknesses? Cost, reputation and (no surprise) parking.

Rebooting a career

NAOMI DICKERSON’S background in Russian literature, dog walking and carpentry may not seem like the building blocks of a career in the tech sector, but through PSU’s New Beginnings program she is now pursuing a master’s in computer science with a fellowship provided by Intel Corp. Intel has pledged $130,000 to New Beginnings, an intensive graduate school prep program designed for students who have a bachelor’s degree, a strong background in math and an interest in a computer science career. Successful participants, like Dickerson, are automatically accepted into PSU’s computer science master’s program.
Demographics tell a story

A FAMILY in Multnomah County with one adult, one infant and one preschooler needs a yearly income of $73,563 to meet basic needs without assistance. But with a median household income of $51,578, it’s no wonder 37 percent of families in the county can’t make ends meet. These figures are available on the Greater Portland Pulse website. A partnership of PSU’s Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies and more than 100 organizations, Greater Portland Pulse tracks social, economic and education data related to our region’s prosperity, and posts reports, interactive maps and charts on subjects such as alternative transportation, homelessness and crime rates at www.portlandpulse.org.

Viking Pavilion partnership

FOLLOWING a successful partnership with PSU on the new Collaborative Life Sciences Building, Oregon Health & Science University has invested $7.5 million toward PSU’s new Viking Pavilion and Academic Center—a major renovation of the Peter W. Stott Center. The $44 remodel will create a multi-purpose, 3,500-seat space and enhanced facilities for classes, student advising, athletic training and an academic center. When completed in 2018, the pavilion will provide space for OHSU events that the Marquam Hill campus cannot. The Viking Pavilion is being funded through a public-private model that includes $24 million in state bonds and a new donation from alumnus Peter W. Stott.
Food from the past

THE ARCHAEOLOGY of food—including 19th-century frontier cuisine—will be explored and celebrated on campus Saturday, May 30, during the Department of Anthropology's fourth annual Archaeology Roadshow in Hoffmann Hall. Part of the celebration focuses on the archaeological remains of food and its preparation found at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site (above and right). Governmental agencies, Native tribes, and local museums and businesses are participating, including Rogue Brewing and Hopworks Urban Brewery. Hopworks is recreating an early 20th-century brew for tasting. The community is invited to bring their own archaeological treasures for analysis by a panel of experts. Photo and illustration courtesy of the National Park Service.

Tell us about your crowdfunding experience

HAVE YOU used crowdfunding to expand your business, launch your invention or produce your film, book, music or art? We want to hear about your experiences—successful or otherwise. For the uninitiated, crowdfunding connects donors with projects in need of support through websites such as Kickstarter or Indiegogo. Projects range from practical to purely creative, and donors receive incentives and rewards for pledging support at different levels. Check out page 24 to read how photographer Kevin Truong ’04 used crowdfunding. Call Portland State Magazine Editor Kathryn Kirkland at 503-725-4451 or email kirklandk@pdx.edu to let us know your story.
Fanfare

Singers make waves

THE CLASSIC "Amazing Grace" is the first song on the PSU Chamber Choir's latest CD, Into Unknown Worlds. You may think you're familiar with the song, but student soloist Genna McAllister's pure voice gives it a hauntingly beautiful quality that makes it a new experience. The PSU Chamber Choir is the school's top choral ensemble, and the 40 talented student singers—under conductor Ethan Sperry—truly shine on the album's 11 a cappella tracks. Sterophile Magazine named Into Unknown Worlds a "Record to Die For" and the CD put PSU in the company of professional European choirs nominated for Best Classical Album from the Contemporary A Capella Society. The CD is available through Amazon.com and CDBaby.com. Photo by Chase Gilley.

Abstract glass

BY FUSING multiple layers of glass, some painted on and others just spectacular in their own right, Susan Harlan creates surprising texture and depth in her abstract pieces. The PSU art professor is retiring soon, but not before exhibiting her work in the new Broadway Lobby Gallery in Lincoln Hall. Her work has been exhibited nationwide and is in the permanent collection of the Art Institute of Chicago and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, among others. The Broadway Lobby Gallery will feature Harlan’s “Drawing Water” exhibit through October, 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 7:30 to 5 p.m. on Friday. The lobby and adjacent glass tower in Lincoln Hall was completed in early 2014 with funding from philanthropist Arlene Schnitzer.
Win an original print

MARRIED graphic art duo Lyn Nance-Sasser and Stephen Sasser ’70 have partnered in printmaking for 35 years, most recently creating whimsical prints featuring a vintage city map overlaid with an iconic image from that city. The Portland-based artists now want to produce a print inspired by Portland State, where they first met and fell in love. Alumni and friends of the University are invited to choose an image that best represents PSU from the icon ideas below:

A. Park Blocks side of Lincoln Hall
B. Simon Benson House
C. Farewell to Orpheus water sculpture in the Park Blocks
D. Four-sided clock in the Urban Center Plaza
E. Portland Streetcar emerging from the Urban Center Plaza

Enter your choice on the website bit.ly.PSUicon or call the editor at 503-725-4451, and you will be eligible to win a framed copy of the winning print. Vote by June 30.
MOST BOOKS tell a story through the words on the page, but Portland State Library’s new Book of Hours weaves a tapestry richer than words. Through the feel of its pages, its colors, its calligraphy and artistic illuminations, it tells the story of the people who created and owned it five centuries ago.

An exhibit of the book—the first intact medieval manuscript in the library’s Special Collections—was created by PSU students enrolled in a unique seminar taught winter term by art history professor Anne McClanan. “Texts of Time: The Portland State Book of Hours and the Medieval Manuscript Tradition” is on display in the library through June 31, and highlights students’ research on the book.

The Book of Hours was the most common manuscript in the middle ages. It consists of a cycle of prayers and psalms to be recited at specific times of day—an abbreviated form of the devotions performed by monks. The most famous of these books were lavishly illuminated and owned by the wealthy, but middle class people often had their own, more modest versions—like the one at PSU.

The PSU Book of Hours lacks the detail and personalization that would indicate it was owned by a noble, but McClanan’s students are fairly certain that the original owner was a bourgeois man or woman who most likely acquired the manuscript in Paris between 1450 and 1475.

“Still, it displays exquisite floral decoration in its margins,” says McClanan. “These borders come alive with vivid red and blue blooms, all set against delicate curving lines that are characteristic of Parisian manuscripts of the time.”

APART FROM its beauty, the PSU Book of Hours’ illustrations and hand lettering reveal the similarities and differences between the pre-modern mindset and that of today.

For instance, modern people think of time much differently, says McClanan. For us, time is an arrow flying into the future—a moment happens and then it’s gone. But the medieval mind understood time quite differently—as a cycle of hours, days, months and seasons that recurred regularly and varied little. The Book of Hours is a tangible example of this concept of time.

The challenge for students in McClanan’s Medieval Manuscript Exhibition Research and Design Workshop was to make sense of the book and decide what kind of story they wanted the exhibit to tell. They asked questions such as, How was the book made? How was it used? What was its significance as a religious object, or as a personal possession?

The seminar also had an interdisciplinary aspect. In addition to undergraduate art history students, participants included a graduate student in French philology—the study of historical texts—and a post-baccalaureate researcher in chemistry who was interested in art conservation. The chemistry student, Kenna Miller, worked with her advisor who specializes in art conservation, chemistry professor Tami Lasseter Clare.

Miller analyzed the chemical composition of the ink and parchment to gain insight into how or where the manuscript was made. The results of the chemical analysis are integrated into the exhibit.

THE MANUSCRIPT’S purchase and student research were supported by private funds and individuals. The library purchased the manuscript through a new special acquisitions fund supported by the estate of alumnus Gordon Hunter. Research materials and lab costs were covered through Normandie and Bob Holmes, who fund Special Collections projects. And in February, Portland philanthropist Richard Brown funded a trip for the seminar students to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Getty Center to meet with professional curators and get a behind-the-scenes look at how they develop manuscript exhibits.

The exhibit is also available to view online at bit.ly/PSUBookOfHours.

Suzanne Gray is marketing manager for the PSU College of the Arts.
Students have created an exhibit in the PSU Library featuring this 15th-century Book of Hours.
ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES have been clouded in controversy for years as their popularity has grown. By January of this year, 15 states and 275 municipalities throughout the United States had enacted laws restricting where they could be used. Forty-one states restrict their sale to minors. As of this writing, Oregon is considering legislation that would add it to the list.

Most of the controversy centers around the fact that nobody seems to know the health dangers of “vaping,” the act of using an e-cigarette to inhale heat-generated, nicotine-laden vapor. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration doesn’t regulate e-cigarettes or the liquid extracts they use. Vaping advocates say it’s a safer alternative to smoking, and that it can help people get off cigarettes. But the World Health Organization in 2014 issued a report stating that there is not enough evidence to support that claim and called for stricter e-cigarette regulations. It seemed that all impressions of vaping—positive and negative—have been based on unknowns.

At least that was the case until January, when Portland State chemistry faculty James Pankow, David Peyton and Rob Strongin released a study finding that levels of cancer-causing formaldehyde in e-cigarette vapor were up to 15 times higher than in a typical cigarette. They published their findings in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the news immediately went viral, and the researchers found themselves in the middle of a media firestorm.

Governmental bodies, including Multnomah County, the State of Oregon, and municipalities throughout the United States cited their work as a reason why vaping should be restricted in public places and kept away from children. It seemed that, finally, there was hard evidence that e-cigarettes could be dangerous.

Then came comments from the other side, claiming that the PSU research didn’t reflect the real world of vaping. Critics said the tests showing high formaldehyde levels were done at extreme voltages that the typical “vaper” would never use. *New York Times* columnist Joe Nocera cited other studies showing that such e-cigarettes had a taste so horrible that people simply could not inhale.

Nocera pointed out that in 2010, 84 percent of current cigarette smokers thought e-cigarettes were a safer alternative, but that number had dropped to 65 percent by 2013. He hinted that the PSU study could drag that number still lower, saying that the study served as a “scare tactic to keep smokers away from e-cigarettes.”
INSIDE THE LAB, chemist David Peyton says he is not out to change people’s habits.

“I consider cars to be more evil than cigarettes, and certainly more than e-cigarettes,” he says. “I’m not on a crusade for either one. I just put out the data so the regulatory people can look at these things.”

He says he was unprepared for the emotional backlash from the publicity surrounding the PSU study. The story of its findings was picked up by at least 179 news outlets on nearly every continent within 10 days of the New England Journal of Medicine article. That figure nearly doubled in the following weeks.

“Various news articles took our study and said e-cigarettes are more dangerous than cigarettes. We never said that. But the story took legs, and before you know it people were talking about experiments we didn’t do and conclusions we didn’t make,” he says.

THE WHOLE THING actually started when Pankow, whose recent work centered around the candy-like flavorings in tobacco, wanted to find out more about the chemistry of nicotine in vapor form. He teamed up with fellow chemists Peyton and Strongin to measure the presence of the various chemicals the vapor contained. They weren’t searching for formaldehyde per se, and were surprised when it showed up in tests at such high levels.

“Our original intent was to look at the flavor molecules. The flavorings they put in tobacco products are deemed safe for eating, but there’s no assurance about inhaling. We wanted to see if they survived the vaping process, and we got sidetracked by the formaldehyde,” Peyton says.

The team looked at one particular e-liquid, but there are hundreds. The e-cigarette they tested was a common model that a user could find in most stores selling vaping materials. E-cigarettes come in different forms, but all are based on the idea of heating liquid with a battery-powered coil to produce an aerosol that is inhaled. Some vaporizers have adjustable power controls so the user can increase or decrease the amount of vapor produced. The one the PSU team used in the lab was not adjustable, yet it produced formaldehyde.

“The critics say whenever you inhale (at the levels where we found formaldehyde), you stop because it tastes bad,” Pankow says. “But that automatically means that you’re exposing yourself to those conditions. This level is a known phenomenon. “Also, it’s pretty well known that inhaling cigars is unpleasant, but people do it,” he says.

SINCE THE STUDY came out, the PSU team, including student assistants Rob Jensen and Zahreh McClure, has been looking at a wider variety of e-cigarette types. They include “drippers” in which the user manually drops liquid onto the heating coil. Drippers produce a bigger vapor hit than other types, and consequently a higher level of formaldehyde than what the researchers found before.

The researchers are preparing a follow-up article for the New England Journal of Medicine, which will be published this spring. Peyton said it will address some of the controversies and will show results from the new round of research.

“We are going to fill in the blank between what we did in the original publication about high power vs. low power to show what happens in the middle,” he says.

Author’s note: The PSU research on e-cigarettes was supported by grants from the Penrose Foundation and the Cooley Fund for Critical Research of the Oregon Community Foundation. It also received support from Regina M. and Michael J. Dowd and Patrick J. Coughlin.

John Kirkland is a staff member in the PSU Office of University Communications.
BACKYARD Edens

How well do natural backyard habitats encourage birds and bugs?

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD
photo by Jim Cruce
PORTLANDERS LOVE green space—from natural areas like the Keller Woodland and Laurelhurst Park to their own backyards. Now, researchers at Portland State and Oregon State University are taking a closer look at how those backyard habitats impact biodiversity in an urban setting. Marion Dresner, environmental science and management faculty, leads the study of yards that are part of Portland’s Backyard Habitat Certification Program. The program, run by the Portland Audubon Society and the Columbia Land Trust, certifies yards based on the level of natural habitat they provide for native plants and animals, as well as pesticide and invasive weed reduction and stormwater management. The program offers three levels of certification: silver, gold and platinum.

These natural Oregon settings nestled in urban areas are verdant and lush, but Dresner, PSU students and collaborators at OSU are seeking to learn how much these spaces actually support diversity in native bird and bug populations. The group has been collecting bird, bug and native plant counts in Portland backyards since 2012, using a $5,000 research stimulus grant Dresner received from PSU. While the researchers have found trends that suggest native habitats support more biodiversity—especially in neighborhoods near nature areas such as Hillsdale’s Keller Woodlands—they now are looking to expand their study and allow “citizen scientists” to collect data in order to get a more complete picture of urban biodiversity and its relation to yard habitats.

“We would like to train Backyard Habitat participants who are interested to help us make these collections and to help us involve other yard owners in a given neighborhood,” Dresner says. “We could have a tremendous amount of data to use, as well as a more highly ecological-literate population.”

WRITTEN BY BESS PALLARES

Clockwise from upper left: Northern flicker, photo by Jim Cruce; western meadowrupe, photo by Tammi Miller; collomia, photo from Backyard Habitat; bee on rabbitbrush, photo from Backyard Habitat.
UNTIL YARD OWNERS join the research, Dresner and a few PSU students collect the data, including biology doctoral candidate Andrew Gibbs. Since the summer of 2013, Gibbs has conducted bird and native plant counts in 188 yards and 99 random spots throughout Portland, from the Mt. Tabor neighborhood in the east to about that distance on the west side, he says.

The Backyard Habitat Certification Program requires different layers of vegetation—moving from ground shrubs to tree cover—so Gibbs examines the three-dimensional habitat, estimating the percent of native vegetation coverage at three levels from 20 to 30 inches off the ground. He also visits yards early in the morning, within four hours of dawn, to count every bird he sees or hears within 490 feet.

“No one has gone into these yards in a systematic manner to check to see if the birds actually care if the yard is certified as a silver yard or a platinum yard,” Gibbs says. “Can the yard be in the middle of the city or does it have to be next to a natural habitat for it to matter to the birds?”

Gibbs recently completed entering his bird data, but so far has completed only about 20 percent of his plant surveys. The time and effort necessary to gather the data is why in November Dresner submitted a grant to the National Science Foundation for four-year support of educational programs for citizen scientists, development of apps to allow yard owners to submit data, hiring of more graduate students, and even expansion of the study to local community gardens and to Chicago, for comparison.

The apps, which would be developed by collaborators at OSU, would allow yard owners with even limited experience in species identification to collect data.

“Yard owners could record a birdsong and the app helps you whittle down the possibilities [of species] to just a few, or maybe even one,” Dresner says.

UNTIL THEY hear back on the grant, research will continue one backyard at a time. Dresner and Gibbs next plan to survey yards in Hillsdale and Laurelhurst, collecting bugs from the native shrubs where they live and thrive more often than on non-native, ornamental plants. The group also hopes to collect aerial photography and perform geographic information system analysis of the city’s tree cover. It’s time-intensive work, but Dresner and her team enjoy the challenge.

“The folks who have established the yard habitats themselves are so inspiring,” she says. “It’s encouraging to keep hearing enthusiastic comments from them about working with natural processes as much as possible.”

Bess Pallares is a PSU book publishing student and a graduate assistant in the Office of University Communications.
The five basic tenets for Backyard Habitat Certification

1. Eliminate invasive weeds such as morning glory, English ivy, knotweeds, Himalayan blackberry and butterfly bush.

2. Encourage native plants such as Oregon oxalis, maidenhair fern, western meadowrue, Nootka rose and tiger lily.

3. Reduce pesticides by handling insects, weeds, slugs and snails, moss, animal pests and fertilizer without chemicals.

4. Manage stormwater to keep runoff from carrying chemicals into rivers and streams. For example, convert your roof into a living “ecoroof.”

5. Steward wildlife by providing habitat for native species including hawks, owls, songbirds and important pollinators like hummingbirds and bees.

Learn more about the program online at backyardhabitats.org

Clockwise from upper left: Pond island of Oregon silverweed, rose checkermallow, lady fern and more, photo by Nikkie West; snowberry checkerspot, photo by Jean Tuomi; red-tailed hawk, photo by Jim Cruce; great blue heron, photo by Jim Cruce; Anna’s hummingbird family, photo by Jim Cruce.
IT HAD BEEN nearly two decades since Matt Miller dropped out of Portland State in 1994 for a well-paying job as a police officer, but his mom still hadn’t forgotten.

Miller always intended to go back, but he put it off because of his irregular work schedule. The longer he waited, the harder it was.

“Are you ever going to finish that degree?” his mom asked.

“Someday,” he said.

She teased him, saying maybe he was too dumb to finish.

That’s it, he thought, I’m going to do it and surprise her.

He called an adviser and learned about PSU’s Last Mile program. Four classes and two terms later, Miller presented his mom with an invitation to his commencement ceremony.

“She started crying,” he says. “She couldn’t have been prouder. It was a really nice moment.”

In the past five years, advisers have helped more than 600 dropouts like Miller earn their degrees—sometimes decades after they left PSU. The Last Mile started with a few advisers looking for ways to clear the path to graduation and has grown into a model for other universities.

It is addictive to help former students who have given up on college finish their degrees, says Robert Mercer, assistant dean in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The hardest part is finding them, he says. Advisers turned into private investigators, using everything from social media to handwritten letters to contact former students.

“Every student’s narrative was different,” Mercer says. “We looked at each situation and tried to figure out why they didn’t finish.”

REMOVING the obstacles took help from people in academic and business offices across campus. Some students needed help paying their outstanding fees or tuition for their last classes. But money often wasn’t the main issue. The initial $50,000 budget for the program was mostly untouched.

Instead, for many students, new graduation requirements had increased the credits and time they needed to finish their degrees. To solve that problem, Last Mile students are allowed to graduate under the requirements from the course catalogue when they were students. Usually students have seven years to complete their degrees before the requirements expire.

Miller, for instance, was 16 credits short of graduation when he dropped out. By the time he looked into returning to PSU, he needed 27 more credits to meet the new degree standards.

With the Last Mile, he could earn his degree by taking only the original missing credits.

For other students, the advising team looked closely at their existing credits from PSU and other schools to meet or waive the requirements.

Lessons learned in the Last Mile have shaped PSU’s push to prevent more students from dropping out in the first place. Using a new student tracking system, advisers can now easily identify individual students and groups who are at risk of not graduating and give them the support they need as soon as
When Kim Stegeman left PSU in 2004 she needed two credits. Last year those credits were waived and the Rose City Roller executive director received her business degree. Photo by Cathy Cheney/Portland Business Journal.

possible. At the top of the list are seniors who have a lot of credits but are missing essential courses to graduate.

The program also inspired a Last Mile Award in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, funded by donors, to help students clear the last financial hurdles.

“I want there to be as few Last Mile students as possible,” Mercer says.

TWO ELECTIVE credits were all that stood between Kim Stegeman and her degree.

She already had a full-time job with an advertising agency while she was attending Portland State in the early 2000s. She failed an online, elective course in personal finance because she didn’t have an Internet connection while she was traveling for work.

Years later, she looked into finishing those last two credits, but she was told she would have to take a full load of classes for two terms to meet the new graduation requirements.

By then, she was executive director of the Rose City Rollers, Portland’s all-female roller derby league, and guest lecturing in PSU business classes.

When an adviser called and told her the business school could waive her last two credits through the Last Mile program, she didn’t believe him at first.

She paid a $20 fee and picked up her diploma.

“It’s nice to have it finalized,” she says. “I play it down, because it wasn’t vital in my current job, but it’s important.”

Miller got his mom off his back, personal satisfaction and a police pay bump when he finished his degree. He encourages anyone who hasn’t finished a degree to contact the Last Mile team for help. The email address is lastmile@pdx.edu.

“If they’re anything like me and it’s been gnawing at them forever, they need to jump into the ring and get it done,” Miller says. “They might be a lot closer than they think to getting their degree.”

Suzanne Pardington is a staff member in the PSU Office of University Communications.
ON A RAINY evening last October, Nancy Ryles’ old friends gathered in Northwest Portland to welcome Claire Feetham to the sisterhood. They dined on chicken satay, with specialty waffles for dessert, and shared stories about Ryles, an Oregon legislator who died of brain cancer in 1990.

Ryles’ friends created a scholarship in her name and Feetham, a PSU senior and single mom, is the latest beneficiary of their generosity. The Nancy Ryles Scholarship has allowed Feetham to focus on her studies and her five-year-old daughter, Guinevere. Without the scholarship, she’d be buried in bills.

“I would have a mountain of debt, that’s for sure,” Feetham says. “I would have a crippling mountain of debt.”

Feetham’s story is familiar to the thousands of students at PSU who rely on loans, scholarships and other forms of financial aid to stay in school and earn a degree. To support these students, the PSU Foundation is raising over $50 million for scholarships through the Creating Futures campaign.

Creating Futures is designed to attract top students to PSU and broaden access to higher education for those who wouldn’t otherwise have the resources to graduate.

“Part of our mission to serve the city is to make our academic excellence as accessible as possible,” PSU President Wim Wiewel says. “Scholarships make that happen.”

The Creating Futures campaign has already made a measurable impact at PSU. Since it launched on July 1, 2012, an additional 122 scholarships have been established at PSU, an increase of more than 20 percent.

In the same period, PSU’s scholarship endowment has grown from $17.5 to $29.4 million. But it still lags considerably behind the scholarship endowments of the University of Oregon ($162 million) and Oregon State University ($175 million).

A BACHELOR’S degree remains a valuable asset in today’s job market. A recent report by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York showed that workers with a bachelor’s degree earn over $1 million more throughout their working lives, compared to those with only a high school diploma.

But paying for a bachelor’s degree has grown increasingly difficult. In Oregon, state support for the cost of higher education has dropped from 80 percent to 12 percent in the past two decades, leading to steep tuition hikes. The funding cuts have been especially painful at PSU, where half of the students are the first in their families to attend college and nearly 60 percent rely on financial aid.

“With the skyrocketing cost of higher education, for many people it becomes unattainable,” says PSU graduate Barre Stoll, who sits on the PSU Foundation Board of Trustees and the Creating Futures steering committee. “Without people getting college educations, we’re dooming our community to mediocrity.”

Even graduates are hindered by the prohibitive cost of a college degree. In 2013, PSU students borrowed $153 million, leaving many with debt that limits their future and their families.

Theresa Just, who completed a licensure program at the PSU Graduate School of Education in 2014, is a learning specialist at a high-poverty Portland-area elementary school. She received a Capps Family Scholarship and a Renaissance Foundation Scholarship while she was at PSU.

“If it wasn’t for the scholarships,” she says, “I wouldn’t have been able to make it through the program.”

Just believes that, for many people, scholarships will eliminate the biggest obstacle blocking their path to a college degree and a better job.

“A lot of great people are debating whether or not to go back to school,” she says. “Any help you can get makes it easier.”

Annie Lai is a sophomore at PSU and the recipient of the Vincent K. Seid, M.D., Scholarship. She’s studying biology and Chinese and hopes to go to medical school after she graduates in 2018.

Lai and her younger sister grew up in Southeast Portland. Their parents emigrated from Cambodia and China. Lai is the
first in her family to go to college and says her scholarship helps ease the financial pressures her parents face.

“For me, as the elder child, I feel this sense of duty where I want to lessen the burden on my parents,” she says. “I don’t want my parents to help me pay for school. They shouldn’t have more burdens than they already have.”

THE CREATING FUTURES campaign has reached its goal six months ahead of schedule. But the PSU Foundation continues to raise money for scholarships.

The campaign reflects the fulfillment of the PSU Foundation’s broader goal of creating a culture of philanthropy at the University. Gifts to PSU have more than tripled in four years, growing from $12.8 million in 2010 to $39.3 million in 2014.

The Nancy Ryles Scholarship goes to students returning to college after their education has been interrupted. Feetham says it has helped her resume her education after attending three colleges while juggling family responsibilities, including the care of her ill father. She will graduate this spring with a bachelor’s degree in science and plans to begin law school in the fall.

The dinner last year with Ryles’ friends and former recipients of the scholarship provided Feetham with what she hopes will be a “lasting support system,” she says.

It also helped her understand the powerful long-term impact scholarships make on the students who receive them.

“It was wonderful to be surrounded by other women who’ve had their education delayed and see that they’ve become successful,” she says, “and how the scholarship has allowed them to do that.”

Steve Beaven is a development writer in the PSU Foundation office.
One is a newly minted Ph.D. with autism. One practices internal medicine and has a child with autism.

When they joined forces—almost by accident—nine years ago, Dora Raymaker and Christina Nicolaidis tapped a potent mix of clinical expertise, social activism and personal experience.

Theirs is a unique story with some made-for-Hollywood moments. More importantly, the pair already is producing results that could have far-reaching impacts for the growing number of autistic adults and other people with disabilities.

Nicolaidis, a professor of social work at PSU and physician at Oregon Health & Science University, had been studying health issues among African Americans and Latinos when her son was diagnosed with autism at age 3. She joined an Internet chat site with other parents of autistic children, and soon noticed that one participant wasn’t posting her problems, but rather her solutions as an autistic adult. (Both Raymaker and Nicolaidis prefer “identity first” usage: autistic adult, instead of “people first” usage: an adult with autism.)

Intrigued by this unique opportunity to learn about autism, Nicolaidis collected the posts and was determined to meet Raymaker, but she was unsure how to make that happen.

“I knew that if I asked her out for coffee, she would say absolutely not,” Nicolaidis says. Raymaker’s interests are clearly more academic than social. Instead, Nicolaidis invited Raymaker to become part of a “journal club” to help review scientific articles on autism.

“She was sneaky,” says Raymaker, who has a background in fine arts and computer programming and is a scrappy advocate for people with disabilities. At the time, she was a graduate student at PSU, fascinated by complex systems and hoping to apply her skills to “computational intelligence”—robots that think, in other words.

But as a woman with a disability, Raymaker says, she got little encouragement. Then came the offer from Nicolaidis.

A door opened, Raymaker walked through it, and a partnership was born.

Raymaker’s critiques of the state of autism research echoed what Nicolaidis was hearing about studies of other minority groups. Too little participation and buy-in from the subjects, along with “dehumanizing” treatment, was hurting the results. “It wasn’t getting the right answers,” Nicolaidis says. The more she talked with Raymaker, the more convinced she became that it was time to take autism research in a new direction.

There were volumes—thousands of pages—about autism in children: how to “treat” it, how to prevent it, how to teach them, how to manage their behavior. There was almost nothing about autistic adults.

“The reality is, there are a lot of individuals on the autism spectrum,” Nicolaidis says, speaking from the perspective of a social scientist who thrives on data and of a parent concerned about the future of her child. “And they grow up.”

Together, Nicolaidis and Raymaker started the Academic Autism Spectrum Partnership in Research and Education at PSU. The model they adopted—community-based participatory research—ensures that people with autism aren’t just studied, but also are involved in all phases of the study: selecting subjects, designing the project, analyzing the results, disseminating findings, deciding on next steps.

The goal: a more accommodating society for autistic adults. For both women, it has been a personal and a professional quest.

“I want my child to live in a world that actually supports him,” Nicolaidis says.

“I’m just a troublemaker,” Raymaker adds with a smile.

Autism, which affects an estimated 1 percent of the population, is hard to pin down. Most experts talk about autism as a “spectrum”—ranging from people who have extremely low cognitive and verbal skills to verified geniuses. Raymaker and Nicolaidis have come to the conclusion that
even that description falls short—autism is ever changing and doesn’t fit neatly on a continuum.

“It’s a movable target,” Raymaker says. She talks in the measured, skeptical tones of an experienced researcher. Yet she also mentions there were years when she didn’t speak, and sometimes will tell an interviewer that a seemingly routine question “doesn’t compute.”

“How well I function depends on how well my environment supports my needs.” Autistic doctoral students aren’t as rare one might think, she adds. “There aren’t tons of us, but we do exist. It’s growing.”

Her interest in disability research is tactical as well as clinical. “I’m interested in how the process of science can be used as a vehicle for political change.”

THE KEY product of Raymaker and Nicolaidis’s research to date is an online “toolkit” aimed at making it easier for autistic adults to navigate the sometimes Byzantine world of health care. It gives clear instructions and recommendations aimed not just at patients but at health care providers as well.

“It’s a great website,” says Tobi Burch Rates, executive director of the Autism Society of Oregon. “It’s going to be extremely helpful for getting adults basic health care.”

Nicolaidis and Raymaker are now doing follow-up research to monitor the website’s effectiveness. But they’re also starting to tackle some other thorny topics in the wide-open field of disability science—top among them: pregnancy.

“There’s an assumption that women with intellectual disabilities don’t get pregnant, or shouldn’t,” Nicolaidis says. “And that’s not the case. They need the resources and tools and information to make good decisions.”

Raymaker, who plans to stay at PSU as a researcher, wants to take the same principles learned from their health care project and apply it to the workplace. It’s another area where autistic people and others with disabilities face severe roadblocks, she says.

“We have to push people out of the margins and into the center,” Raymaker says. “We’re not going to hide behind closed doors.”

Harry Esteve is a staff member in the PSU Office of University Communications.
KEVIN TRUONG’S STORY of morphing from Portland State economics major to globe-trotting chronicler of the gay experience reads like a cross between a coming of age novel and an artist’s manifesto.

The son of a Vietnamese immigrant, Truong grew up in east Portland, a restless youth who kept his own gay identity secret for years. After finally coming out—first to his PSU senior capstone professor, then to everyone—he followed through on a lifelong dream after his 2004 graduation by joining the Peace Corps. He was stationed in Belize, a country where homosexuality is against the law.

“They said, ‘You just have to go back in the closet,’” Truong recounts. He tried, but quit after two months. “I couldn’t be in a country where it is illegal to be who I am.”

At one of those decisive crossroads in life, Truong moved to New York City and enrolled in a photography program at the Pratt Institute. He began shooting portraits of his friends, then expanded to the broader gay community.

He created a blog, posting the photos and brief stories of his subjects. The blog took off, and so did Truong—to London, Paris and an across-America road-trip, photographing gay men and posting them. He’s up to 700 now. The photos, he says, show gay men as they are—proud, playful, loving, professional, intense or serene—and help break down societal barriers.

This endeavor became The Gay Men Project, and is now the energetic 32-year-old’s life work. He raised more than $33,000 through Kickstarter and is traveling round-the-world interviewing and photographing people along the way. So far he has been to 22 countries and five of them—Kenya, Singapore, Malaysia, India and Indonesia—have laws that make homosexual activity illegal.

“Photographing men who live in the townships of Cape Town, South Africa, and the first same-sex couple legally married in the history of Argentina have made this trip pretty amazing,” says Truong.

He sometimes finds himself defending his work. Is it activism? Why only gay men and not the larger LGBT community?

“I do care about change,” he says. “But I’m not a policymaker. I’m creating art. The world can do what it wants with it.”

WRITTEN BY HARRY ESTEVE
ALUMNI IN THE NEWS

Roy Heikkala MBA ’74 is a general contractor and owner of Rite Mentor Investments, Inc., a development consulting firm in Vancouver, Wash. He has a 40-year background in commercial, industrial and residential construction.

David Stockwell ’90 is director of the VA Health Care System of Northern California, where he oversees a network of hospitals, clinics and over 3,000 employees. He lives in Folsom, Calif.

Gustavo Balderas MS ’01 was appointed superintendent of the Eugene School District. He starts in July.

Jenifer Hilburn ’01 is a new riverkeeper with the nonprofit Altamaha Riverkeeper organization in Savannah, Georgia. She investigates issues that affect the ecology of the river.

Julie Huckestein MS ’04 was appointed president of Chemeketa Community College in February. She has served as an administrator at the Salem college since 2001.

Natasha Hartsfield ’05 is educational director at the Tallahassee Museum, a nonprofit history and natural science museum in northern Florida.

Paulina Almaraz ’11 is a scholarship/event coordinator with the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber in Portland.

Larry O’Dea ’13 was sworn in as chief of the Portland Police Bureau in January. He is a 28-year veteran of the bureau.

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Central City Concern, a Portland-based social service agency, has established four annual scholarships for its employees at Portland State University.

The scholarships, for $2,500 each, are part of Central City Concern’s ongoing efforts to provide career development services for more than 700 employees. Roughly half of the people who work for Central City Concern are living in recovery and many have worked their way through its rehabilitation programs to earn full-time jobs at the agency.

“We really view our employees as part of our mission,” says Rebecca Birenbaum, Central City Concern’s chief compliance and administrative officer. “It’s not just about keeping them employed. It’s about helping them reach their higher potential.”

Central City Concern provides housing, employment services, health care, addiction treatment and peer support for more than 13,000 people each year. The agency also owns about 30 properties, many of which include affordable housing.

The agency began working on the scholarship project with the PSU Foundation in December. To be eligible, employees must be working at least 20 hours and taking at least six hours of classes per term. The first scholarship recipients were named in April.

Central City Concern is the second employer in recent months to establish scholarships at PSU for its staff. Pizzicato Pizza announced last year it will help up to 10 employees per academic year with tuition, fees and/or living expenses.

The Scholarship programs at Pizzicato Pizza and Central City Concern are part of the PSU Foundation’s Creating Futures campaign, which has an initial goal of raising $50 million to support deserving students, many of whom are the first in their families to go to college and would otherwise lack the means to earn a degree.

Recipients of the Central City Concern scholarships are not required to take classes in disciplines related to their jobs, such as social work or public health.

“If somebody wants to go to school for the work we’re doing, that would be awesome,” says Alex Cook, a training and development specialist at Central City Concern. “But we are not requiring that. We want people to go to school for what they want to do.”

Central City Concern is funding the scholarships through its education budget, not via private donations. Birenbaum said that ultimately the agency would like to expand its scholarship offerings and provide funds for licensure programs.

“Our hope would be to make this as big as we can,” she says, “and offer it to as many employees as we can.”

Central City Concern employees are receiving scholarships to attend Portland State through a new program started by their employer. Photo courtesy of Central City Concern.
**THE NEW YEAR** brought big changes to Portland State Athletics. Following a national search, Mark Rountree took over as director of Athletics in January. He has spent more than two decades in collegiate athletics administration, most recently as deputy athletics director at Miami University of Ohio.

Rountree takes over a Viking program that has won 28 conference team championships and made 17 NCAA post-season appearances since 2003. But he faces immediate challenges, including getting the Viking Pavilion project—a $44 million upgrade to the Peter W. Stott Center—through construction; assisting with the turnaround of a football program that has had only one winning season in the past eight years; and shepherding new growth in athletics development and fundraising.

“My plan is to make Viking Athletics a source of pride for Portland State and the city of Portland,” says Rountree.
Join us at pdx.edu/alumni

Here are some of the benefits you will find:

**AlumniBridge** is a free, innovative job platform that helps alumni find the perfect job and employers find the perfect employee. This is a great tool for job-seekers and employers alike.

Stay connected to **Campus Rec, the library, and the Bike Hub** with special alumni memberships.

Find **travel and insurance discounts** through our partner pages.

Receive **career and professional development** advice through our free online career community for alumni and students. We feature live webinars each month and an archive of past career presentations.

**Becoming a member of the PSU Alumni Association** is the easiest way to maintain a connection to Portland State University and our community of over 150,000 alumni worldwide. Membership is free! Just sign up online at pdx.edu/alumni to unlock a host of benefits and services.
FIFTY YEARS AGO a small group of students made sure the nation knew the name Portland State College by winning NBC’s College Bowl, one of most popular national television shows of 1965. The Sunday quiz show, sponsored by General Electric, pitted teams of college whiz kids from across the country against each other.

The PSC team, coached by the late speech professor Ben Padrow (right photo, lower left), knocked off its competitors for five consecutive weeks, retiring as champions, and setting a new record for total points scored. At the time Portland State had only been designated a college for 10 years.

Jim Westwood, now senior counsel at Stoel Rives law firm in Portland, was captain of the team and is the sole surviving first-team member. The other members were Michael Smith (Smith Memorial Student Union was named in his memory), Larry Smith, and Robin Freeman. Alternates were Jim Cronin, Marv Foust, Doug Hawley, Al Kotz and Jim Watt. Student Brian Fothergill is credited for securing PSC a spot on the quiz show. □
Anita Ramachandran, MBA ‘07
Partnerships Development Officer,
Mercy Corps